

# More Baby Boomers are caring for their aging relatives

**Susan Felt**

The Arizona Republic

Aug. 13, 2005 12:00 AM

It's past quitting time and Annette Iniguez is still at work on a Thursday night. But before she can go home to her husband and daughter, Iniguez will stop by her 75-year-old uncle's house to make sure his cut is healing.

"I have the bulk of his care, at least three times a week," says Iniguez.

Her uncle cut his arm last week and Iniguez has been nursing the wound, making sure it doesn't get infected and further complicate his life, and therefore, hers.

Iniguez is part of a fast-growing population: Baby Boomers caring for their aging relatives.

Born between 1946 and 1964, boomers have parents who are living longer and surviving illnesses that previously would have been fatal, says Jackie Moran, director of caregiving initiatives for the Foundation for Senior Living, a private, non-profit organization that assists seniors, people with disabilities and their families.

Moran says calls to the foundation are increasing from middle-aged boomers needing resources and information about caring for relatives who are either living locally or in another state. The search for that assistance can be frustrating.

"There are folks calling for service who have called 20 different people with no help," she says.

"They're trying to get to work. They're trying to care for their kids," says Moran, describing a daily juggle that more and more boomers are experiencing.

The Foundation for Senior Living, along with the City of Phoenix and St. Joseph Hospital and Medical Center, is sponsoring a free workshop to help adult children find out about resources, stages of caregiving and what can be expected, and needed, at each of those stages. The two-hour workshop will be offered twice, during the evening Aug. 23 and at lunch hour Aug. 25 at Burton Barr Central Library in Phoenix.

According to a recent Foundation for Senior Living report, 13 percent of Arizona's population is over 65 years, 1 percent higher than the national average. By 2025, that number will increase to 20 percent of the population.

And of those estimated 765,000 elderly people, 26.3 percent live alone, like Iniguez's uncle.

"He has no children. He just has us," Iniguez says of the uncle she describes as loving like a father.

Moran says not only are the elderly living longer but they are also surviving conditions that leave them in a debilitated state longer.

For Christine Vahling, 60, her parents' decline has been gradual.

Her mother is 89, her father, 87. Until four years ago, her parents continued to live in New York. Her mother didn't retire until she was near 80. She commuted into Manhattan to work as a secretary for a judge. But after her retirement, Vahling began noticing her mother's loss of memory and the signs of early dementia during their weekly phone conversations. The decision was made for them to move to Mesa to be closer to Vahling and her family.

"It's like starting all over again," says Vahling, who finds her days devoted to caring for her parents. She and her husband have raised five children, the youngest of whom is 19. Vahling teaches Montessori pre-school. In two weeks, her parents will move into a home her father bought to accommodate the two households.

They've hired a caregiver to cover the mornings, helping her mother get bathed, dressed and to read to her and help her with writing. Her father has macular degeneration and diabetes. "He tires easily," Vahling says.

"They really are my priority now," says Vahling. "My choices have to revolve around making sure their needs are covered."

It's bittersweet. She and her husband were on the verge of being empty nesters and were looking forward to the promise of some freedom. But caring for aging parents is something that Vahling watched her mother and aunts do for their mother. "You do what needs to be done," she says.

Beverly Mirise, a registered nurse, psychologist and director of Behavioral Medicine at St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center, says taking care of aging relatives can take a psychological and emotional toll on caregivers, something she and others will discuss at the workshop.

Although her children are grown and on their own, Mirise counts herself among the boomers looking after an aging parent. In her case, it's her 90-year-old father who lives in California alone in his own home.

"I work hard to keep him as independent as I can," she says.